

Claims

1. A network-attached peripheral appliance (NAPA), comprising:

5 a powered peripheral node (PPN), enabling connection of a plurality of peripheral devices to a network at a network node without a computer at said network node, the PPN including:

 a data connection enabling data communication between the NAPA and the network, configured to accommodate data connection of the plurality of peripheral devices at the NAPA;

10 a power supply configured to provide power to the plurality of peripheral devices, the PPN enabling use of the plurality of peripheral devices connected to the NAPA by users on the network; and

 at least one case configured to carry and operatively support the PPN and at least one of the plurality of peripheral devices.

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2. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, wherein the data connection comprises one of

- a) a wired connection; and,
- b) a wireless connection,

between the NAPA and the network.

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3. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, wherein the data connection uses a protocol of a type which is one of: USB; FireWire; Ethernet; Bluetooth; WiFi; SCSI; IDE; Serial; Parallel, and TCP/IP.

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4. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, wherein at least one of the connected peripheral devices is one of: an image output device; an image capture device; a data storage device; a printer; and a data connection hub.

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5. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, wherein one of the peripheral devices comprises a printer, the NAPA being configured to reside within a dimensional footprint of the at least one case carrying the printer.

6. A NAPA as set forth in claim 5, wherein the NAPA is configured to fit within and use a space otherwise taken by a paper tray of the printer.

7. A NAPA as set forth in claim 5, wherein the NAPA is configured so that the printer can be placed on top of the NAPA.
- 5 8. A NAPA as set forth in claim 7, further comprising a connector configured so that the data connection between the printer and the NAPA is made when a bottom of the printer is placed adjacent a top of the NAPA.
- 10 9. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, further comprising a bay configured for receiving at least one of the peripheral devices.
- 15 10. A NAPA as set forth in claim 9, further comprising an additional data port configured for connection of one of the peripheral devices.
- 20 11. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, wherein the data connection further comprises a wireless data connection.
12. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, further comprising a first case portion and second case portion, wherein the first case portion carries the PPN and the second case portion carries at least one of the peripheral devices and is connectable to the first case portion.
- 25 13. A NAPA as set forth in claim 12, wherein the at least one peripheral device comprises a printer.
14. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, wherein the PPN and a printer are carried within the at least one case and share at least a power supply.
- 30 15. A NAPA as set forth in claim 14, further comprising at least one additional peripheral device carried in the case with the PPN and the printer.
16. A NAPA as set forth in claim 14, wherein the case includes a bay configured for receiving an additional peripheral device.

17. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, wherein the NAPA is configured to accommodate attachment of a peripheral module, enabling modular expansion by adding additional peripheral device modules, each containing at least one of the plurality of peripheral devices.
- 5 18. A NAPA as set forth in claim 1, further comprising an enabling key, wherein connection of at least one of the plurality of peripheral devices to the appliance is made allowable or discouraged by the key.
- 10 19. A NAPA as set forth in claim 18, wherein the key comprises one of an electronic key and a physical compatibility key.
20. A powered peripheral node (PPN) appliance configured for use in a network environment, comprising:
- 15 a network data connection between the appliance and a network;
- a plurality of peripheral data connections, each configured for data connection of a peripheral device to the appliance, whereby a plurality of peripheral devices can be connected to the appliance and can be in data communication with clients on the network;
- 20 a peripheral device power supply connection configured to provide power to the plurality of peripheral devices, at least one peripheral device supply voltage being thereby made available;
- a housing configured to carry the power supply connection and at least one of the peripheral data connections,
- wherein the PPN appliance is configured to cooperate with the network to provide a PPN and enable data communication between the plurality of peripheral devices connected to the appliance and the network without a computer at a location of the PPN.
- 25 21. The powered peripheral node appliance of claim 20, wherein the PPN appliance is configured to reside within a dimensional footprint of the housing and to carry a printer.
- 30 22. The powered peripheral node appliance of claim 20, wherein one of said data connections is a wireless data connection.

23. The powered peripheral node appliance of claim 20, further comprising a case, wherein the case is configured to be connectable to a case enclosing and operatively supporting one of the plurality of peripheral devices connectable to the PPN appliance.
- 5 24. A powered peripheral node (PPN) appliance, comprising:
- a housing;
 - a power supply carried within the housing;
 - a network data connection enabling data communication between the appliance and the network;
- 10 a plurality of peripheral data connections configured for connection of a plurality of peripheral devices with the network via the network data connection;
- the plurality of connected peripheral devices thus being able to be powered by the power supply and to be in data communication with clients on the network via the PPN appliance.
- 15 25. A method for providing network access to a plurality of peripheral devices via a powered peripheral node (PPN) on a network, comprising the steps of:
- providing a PPN appliance, including configuring the PPN appliance with a capability for enabling provision of a network address for connected peripheral devices, and a capability for data communication between the network and the connected peripheral devices;
 - enabling connection of a plurality of peripheral devices to a network at a PPN, via the PPN appliance at a network address, and without need for a computer workstation at the PPN appliance location; and,
 - enabling power supply at the PPN providing a compatible power supply to said plurality of peripheral devices via the PPN appliance;
- 20 whereby a plurality of peripheral devices can be accessed at a network address provided at the PPN, and the plurality of peripheral devices can be conveniently located at a location without need for providing a computer workstation at that location.
- 25 26. The method of claim 25, wherein the step of providing a PPN appliance, including configuring the PPN appliance with (i) a capability for having the network address and (ii) a capability for data communication between the network and the plurality of peripheral devices, and further comprising the step of providing for data translation, so that communication between the PPN appliance and at least one of the plurality of peripheral

devices is performed by use of a different communications protocol than that used to provide a data communication capability between the PPN appliance and the network.

27. The method of claim 25, further comprising the step of housing the PPN appliance within a case and with a printer, and wherein data communication between the printer, as one of said plurality of peripheral devices, and the network is enabled.
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28. The method of claim 25, further comprising the step of enabling location of at least two of said plurality of peripheral devices within a single case also carrying the PPN appliance.